

Conference Conclusions
“Reconstruction and Stabilization Operations: The Challenge Before Us”
The U.S. Institute of Peace
March 22 and 23, 2005

On March 22 and 23, 2005, the United States Institute for Peace organized a meeting with leaders of peacekeeping missions to extract critical lessons for reconstruction and stabilization operations. Mission leaders from Timor-Leste, Iraq, Kosovo, Liberia, Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Haiti held frank, closed-door discussions with the U.S. Department of State’s Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization on the first day. The second day’s public panels were attended by approximately 200 NGO, military, USG, think-tank, and international representatives. The following is a compilation of key insights from these meetings. The conclusions represented here do not necessarily reflect consensus on the part of conference participants, or the views of S/CRS or S/CRS staff.

General Conclusions

- Addressing the challenges of reconstruction and stabilization (R/S) is a front order foreign policy and security concern. It is the intersection between the Global War on Terror and the response to failing states that provide breeding grounds for organized crime, trafficking, and terrorism.
- Unity of effort, with the military, NGO, and international community is key to addressing the challenges of failing and fragile states.
- The USG and international community must develop capabilities for R/S missions and dedicate resources commensurate with the priorities of national defense and global security.
- Mandates for peacekeeping or R/S operations must be focused, include authorities consistent with mission goals, and be realistic given available resources. A disconnect between ambitious mandates and inadequate resources will always spell failure.
- The nature of a particular R/S challenge includes the character of the domestic leadership in collapsing states, the plight of citizens abandoned by their leadership, and organized crime.
- A robust capacity to assess the financial flows in a country, including detailed information about the distribution of incomes from natural resources, public utilities, and customs duties is crucial to address criminal networks and power relationships at work in crises.

- If international missions do not address criminal networks and cultures of impunity, other goals—like job creation, security, and economic growth—will fail. The rule of law must apply to rulers, international interveners, companies, and local citizens.
- A joint-civilian military planning process that examines periodic benchmarks and matches resources to goals is sorely needed. (NB: S/CRS is currently developing such a framework.)
- What might apply in one R/S case, may not apply in another. It is important to scrutinize carefully how a past lesson might apply to a new context.
- International responsibilities in an R/S operation must be better focused on the transition to local control.

Mandates

- The mandate is the absolute key and should endow mission leadership with the breadth of authority required to execute the mandate. Mandates should result from a reasonable and honest assessment of what one wants to create and what one is willing to contribute.
- The intentions of donors and those of political players must be integrated in the process of designing and implementing a mandate.
- Ideally, the leadership of a mission should be part of the process for crafting the mandate.
- It is often easier to be successful in an operation, if it has a UN mandate.
- Mandates must take on issues of criminality and organized networks.
- There is a natural dilemma regarding expectations and mandates. To have success on the ground, one needs international buy-in and to capture the international community with a noble vision. Yet, this contributes to the very problem of raising expectations beyond that, which is realistic or feasible.

The Rule of Law

- Upholding a legal framework and punishing criminality are urgent priorities in restoring public order. The USG and international community must develop more responsive resources in this area.
- The first issue in rule of law is whether rulers are subject to law. If rulers are above the law, there is no rule of law. International engagement in the administration of justice to clear out criminals is part of upholding rule of law.

- Peacekeepers and international staff must also be subject to the rule of law.
- Unless the mission tackles rule of law questions, large sums of donor funds in R/S operations will go straight into the hands of criminals.
- The auditing function is therefore crucial. It is imperative to know how money is spent in the territory and what financial flows exist.
- The rule of law is not confined to ministries, police, justice, and courts. The rule of law is about public and private law— the regulation of important sources of revenue. Public utilities, for example, are often cash cows for criminal organizations. Likewise, questions related to licensing, for example in the telecom or media sectors, are central to the rule of law.
- More attention needs to be focused on informal institutions that can deliver rule of law. What are the roles of third party arbitrators and other mechanisms that all societies have?
- There are sometimes tradeoffs between peace and justice. Certain stakeholders might be necessary to include in the political process to hold the peace, but may be an extremely visible demonstration of justice denied. Impunity if allowed to continue will prove problematic to a viable peace.

The Political Process and Governance

- The concept of building peace has a lot to do with state building and the nature of the state. If state building doesn't succeed, neither will the peace.
- Every decision in the near-term of an R/S operation is political. If there is a void of a broad-based political process, negative forces will fill it.
- The development of a transitional political process with clear benchmarks, incentives for political buy-in, and management tools to strengthen local governing capacity is essential to mission exit strategies and the transfer to local power.
- The decision of who to empower has enormous ramifications for state-building objectives. There is often an instinctive trade-off between the short-term identification of power-holders and the long-term process of addressing criminality and past legacies of power.
- The magnetic pull of a substantial carrot, like EU membership, can create political will. It is less clear how to spur that political will without such a large incentive.

- Revenue generation is an essential component of governance and can be debilitating to transitional governments. International resources must be accountable and responsive to a common international framework that coincides with host national government budgets to avoid the creation of duplicative structures.
- Expect an overwhelming urge to hold elections. Interveners feel guilty, want to promote participation, and are looking for an exit strategy. Beware of negative ramifications of early elections—electing criminals, legitimating hardliners, institutionalizing zero-sum political processes, etc.
- One of the goals of US Army Civil Affairs units is to organize the self-determination of people in the wake of combat. There is an uncertain trumpet, however, from political leadership as to their role in nation-building. Civilian political advisors are needed alongside the military at the local level when these crucial political decisions are made. (NB: S/CRS is developing an operational concept for embedding civilian expertise into the military for this purpose.)

Multilateral Coordination

- Better donor coordination and bilateral participation in multilateral institutions is mandatory. “The cats behind you (home office) are often more difficult to herd than the cats in front of you (on the ground)”.
- Parallel bureaucracies and budgets undermine local ownership and capacity building. Local capacity building might be supported by the following:
 - Limit the number of sectors to which international donors can contribute, with the exception of gender, security, and rule of law programming.
 - Write aspects of coordination into the peace agreement, or use local administration as the locus for coordination. In a UN mission, for example, coordination management should be written into the Security Council Resolution.
 - Force NGOs and UN agencies to publish their accounts to set an example of transparency in the community.
 - Explore lessons from lead-nation models. Leadership of different sectors might be assigned to different actors.
- A process must be developed to corral the NGO community and bring their value-added more directly to identified priorities.
- The UN has been most successful in its peacekeeping missions when: neighboring states are cooperative; there is an agreed framework and mandate for the mission; and the mission has the backing of several influential governments.

- The UN is perhaps “a better organization for legitimizing things than running things”. The UN does bring, however, access to skill sets from around the world.
- Donors need to infuse assistance funding when local leaders can absorb it. All too often the international community funnels money when the crisis is still in the news. When things settle down and locals start assuming leadership roles, the international community “turns off the tap”.
- The international community needs a more principled approach to international technical assistance. What are the functions of international advisors? How long will they be involved? What is the plan for a transfer to local ownership of these responsibilities?
- Bring in language skills. One translator for every 3-4 foreigners/soldiers is not sufficient. It is not sufficient to have a group of 10-12 internationals trying to communicate with host nationals through a single translator.

The Military

- There is not consensus on whether military forces should be involved in law enforcement activities. Some discussants stated that law enforcement roles are simply a part of modern soldiering, while others pointed out that troop-contributing states will not allow military mandates to include law enforcement.
- Soldiers should have construction capabilities for practical utility and to demonstrate the constructive side of military forces.
- All military personnel should understand that their role is to collect intelligence. They should always be observing and reporting. Otherwise, they could be just holding ground while insurgents take the initiative against them.

Iraq

- The removal of Saddam Hussein was a revolution, just as momentous for the Iraqi people as the French or U.S. Revolutions. It was the reversal of communal power distributions in the country.
- It is important to scrutinize what people want and need. To say that we will provide security to Iraqis does not have an impact. Before the intervention, people in Iraq had security unless they challenged the regime. In reality, what people in Iraq needed were improvements in their material lives – they had no electricity, food, income, schools, etc. Essentially, everything was broken *except for the security system*.

- First impressions are important. Many Iraqis waited to see what would happen and were forming judgments in early days of the intervention about the efficacy and sincerity of the coalition's administrative systems.
- For far too long the Coalition failed to recognize that only Iraqis can deal effectively with the insurgency.
- Public diplomacy failed completely in Iraq. What did work was the individual diplomacy of civilian and military individuals going directly into the communities and working hand in hand with those communities.

Afghanistan

- The original goal of the international community in Afghanistan was to counter terrorism, but the goal of locals was a stable state.
- Democracy without the creation of a viable middle class is not sustainable.
- UN aid agencies are a major problem in Afghanistan. They create parallel national infrastructures that compete with the emerging government's efforts to gain legitimacy and employ qualified people.
- Afghanistan will be challenged to change cultural norms to take full advantage of all human resources available. Women need to have the same opportunities as men.
- The drug trade is the single greatest threat to Afghanistan's rebuilding.

The Balkans

- Personnel must remain in missions longer than one year. Annual rotations do not allow personnel the time necessary to contribute to their full potential or to build trusting relationships with the local population.
- Education is "the" fundamental problem in Bosnia. Schools teach separation and advocate the difference between the ethnic groups. Post-conflict planning needs to take into account the need to impact the education system in the crisis country.
- There is no grass roots reform movement in Bosnia. The mindset across the region remains focused on the old command economy, with little attention given to a viable economic framework.